



SpaLife

the magazine devoted to the rejuvenation of body and soul

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BY SUSAN MATE

East-meets-west wellness centre

"Life is a series of choices. Today yours are good ones."

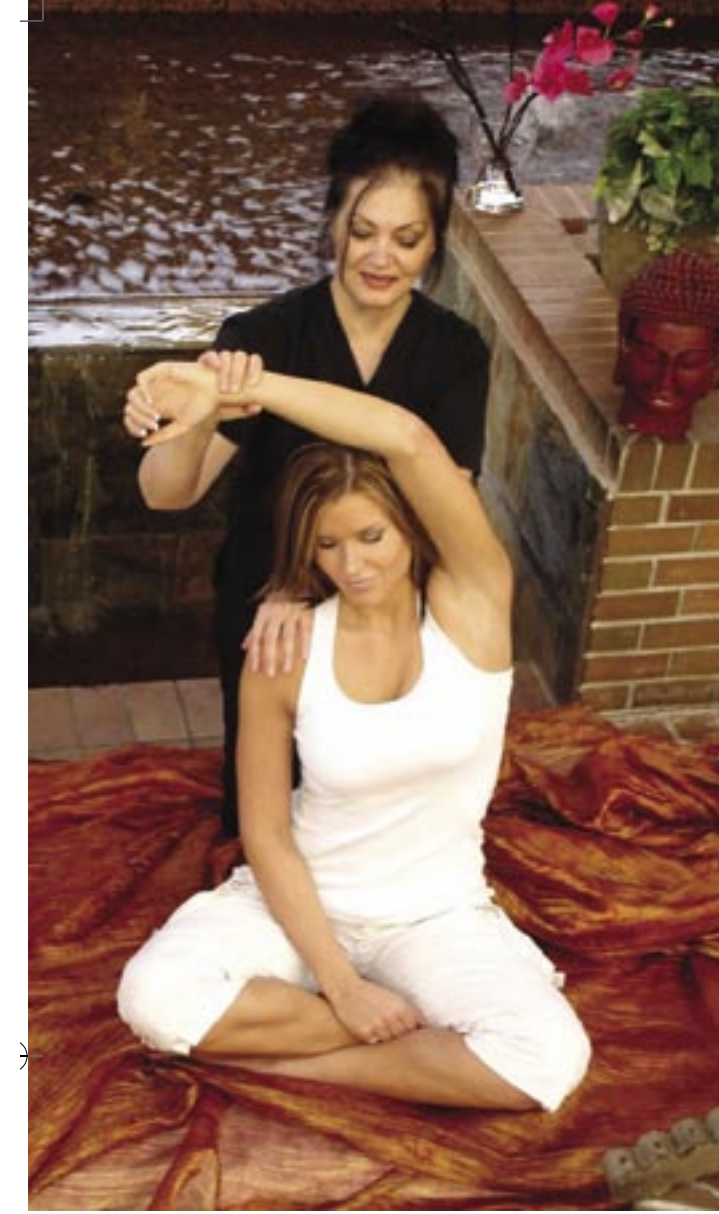
Alberta Massage and Spa (www.albertaspaandmassage.com); 403-580-3334. 1051 Ross Glen Drive S.E. Hours: Mondays, noon-8 p.m.; Tues.-Fridays, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.; Saturdays, 9 a.m.-8 p.m.; Sundays, closed but can be booked for private group functions. Indoor/outdoor hot tub available, the hotel also boasts a casino and waterpark.



It took mere minutes for my fortune cookie's prophecy to unfold as I headed down the curved hallways of the stylish Alberta Massage and Spa. Two steps beyond the glass doors, I was transported by an exotic blend of fragrances, sounds and art.

The spa in the Medicine Hat Lodge, owned by Shelly Bootland and Haris Softic, was designed following the Chinese principle of Feng Shui (pronounced fang shway). This is the ancient practice of arranging space to achieve harmony with the environment. "Everything follows the same pattern as water or wind," explains Bootland. "It creates energy and it moves energy through the spa. It's very healing, very therapeutic."

This east-meets-west wellness centre features treatments rarely found in spas elsewhere in Canada. One example is a form of lymphatic drainage for the face that uses pure monochromatic light. This system was pioneered by award-winning Phytobiodermie, a Swiss company that relies on the five energy principles of traditional Chinese medicine – wood, fire, earth, metal and water. "It's a bit like getting a facelift without the facelift – it erases fine lines and wrinkles, improves circulation, decreases puffiness and helps detoxify the skin," Bootland explains.



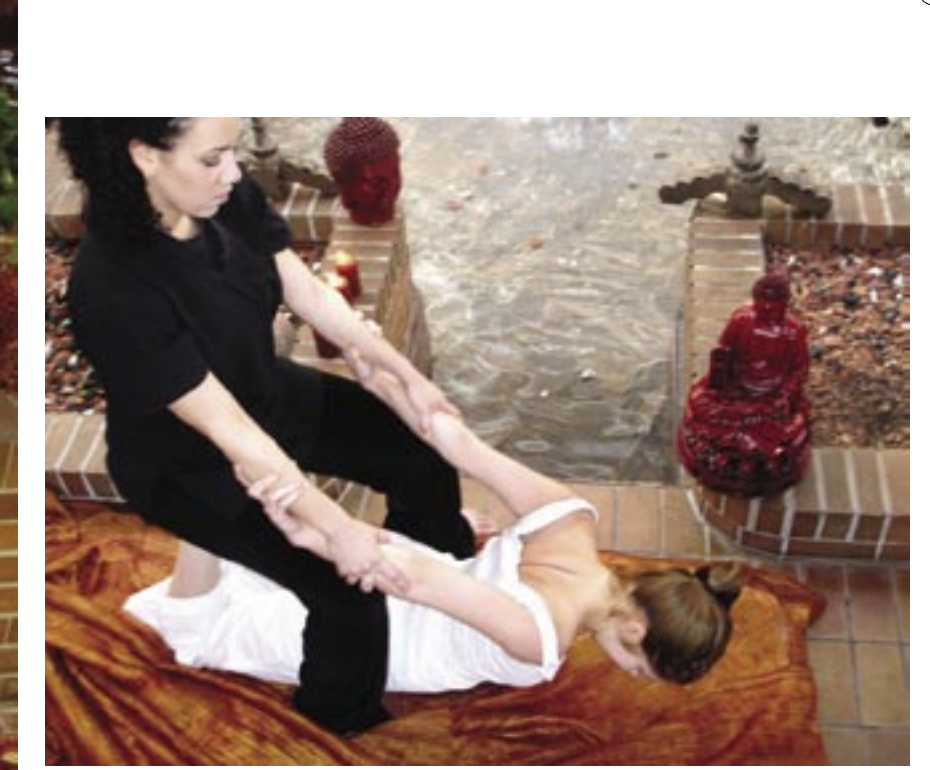
I'm lying face-up underneath the infrared sauna – a tubular device that emits soothing warmth as well as healing infrared rays. Bootland is standing at my side with a paintbrush and an artist's palette bursting with rainbow colours, each potion targeting my individual skin chemistry, body tone and biorhythm. Step-by-step, she explains the meaning of each coloured cream as she carefully paints them on targeted parts of my face. There are 285 possible combinations of colours that may be used depending on the client's chemical balance and seasonal energy change. My eyes are closed, soothed by cool cucumber slices. Bootland strokes the right side of my face and neck with a plastic wand emitting lavender, yellow and other shades of light.



Then, it's time for intraoral cranial facial release. Wearing a pair of thin rubber gloves (available in a variety of fruity flavours, no less), Bootland inserts one hand into the right side of my mouth. She begins to palpate my inner cheek along the back of my right jaw while pulling and stretching my right cheek. It hurts, though not a lot. I realize that the fascia and tendons of my face are locked with tension. My therapist asks me turn my head from left to right to compare the difference. Remarkable. From my cheek down to my neck, my right side is considerably more relaxed. Once my facial treatments are complete, she hands me a mirror. The right side of my face looks considerably smoother, less puffy; my cheekbones and jaw, more defined.

"You can really see the difference from this treatment," Bootland says. Lymphatic massage and light therapy are very beneficial for a variety of conditions including skin ailments, chronic headaches, facial and other injuries and pre- and post-surgical care.

The spa also offers several one-of-a-kind pedicures. In one of four stations filled with eggplant-coloured recliners tucked behind a Chinese screen, I am treated to the Fabeau-lous Feet Pedicure System. A foot-pedal powdered wand with disposable pads tickles as it polishes away my bumps and calluses. Bootland and I decide to do another comparison. When she has finished, my left foot is



sleek from toes to sole; the right one we leave untouched. I feel the difference in my step as I drift down the hall toward the relaxation room, where I rest by a roaring fire and sip refreshing water steeped with fresh cucumber.

Next, I am led to a massage table where co-owner Softic demonstrates his talent for Japanese hot stone massage. Unlike many treatments that involve simply placing stones on acupressure or meridian points, Softic uses the smooth rocks and special oils to work through the knots in my muscles. He also offers Thai "stem" massage in which bundles of special herbs encased in cloth are used in the same way as the rocks. In the spa's signature Thai massage, clients lie clothed, on a mat, as the therapist stretches and pulls the body to loosen muscles and boost flexibility.

Softic and Bootland also offer a line of chocolate-scented products such as massage oil, skin cream, bath potions that the spa developed to meet the growing demand for its weekly Wednesday chocolate days. Every mid-week and on Mother's Day, the spa turns into a chocoholic's dream featuring chocolate-themed treatments as well as bonbons, cocoa and cakes. These products are distributed across Canada. The spa's line of nature-inspired products will soon be available from an online store. It's all part of bringing the wellness experience beyond simply the spa.

"We've tried to incorporate ideas that we found unique to give people a very powerful experience," Bootland says.

